

Liberation by murder: Baghdad falls to American invasion

James Conachy
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After three weeks of death and destruction, the US media on Wednesday finally captured on film the scene it had been waiting for: the city of Baghdad falling to American tanks and troops.

Some Iraqis in this traumatized city stood by and cheered. The American and British media, in their stupid, cynical and inhumane manner, chose to portray this spectacle of humiliation and demoralization as genuine exhilaration and joy.

What the media has chosen not to focus its lenses on are those, the vast majority, who are not cheering or applauding—the countless thousands who cannot cheer because they are either gravely wounded or dead, and the tens of thousands who have lost loved ones and are benumbed with grief.

There is no official estimate of how many Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded by the cluster bombs, rockets and bullets unleashed on the troops defending the southern approaches of the capital. The American military has not counted. As the US prepared to attack Baghdad proper, Pentagon spokesmen simply reported that the six divisions of the 80,000-strong Iraqi Republican Guard outside the city had been “degraded” or rendered “ineffective” by aerial and ground bombardment.

Dan Goure, an analyst for the Lexington Institute, told the Associated Press on April 8: “It may never be known how many Iraqis were killed.... It would have to be over 10,000 uniformed Iraqis and more if you include irregulars.” Dana Dillion, a military analyst for the Heritage Foundation, commented: “It’s difficult to verify, especially when you’re dropping bombs on people and you don’t go and count the bodies.”

Ted Koppel of ABC TV’s *Nightline* program, who has spent the war embedded with the US Third Infantry Division, told the *New York Times*: “This war is fought in many respects at arm’s length. The damage is done, people are killed, but without the people who do the killing seeing very much of the consequences until hours or days later, when they advance.” By then, the Iraqis have taken many of the bodies away for burial.

After slaughtering the defenders outside the city, American forces entered Baghdad on the evening of April 3. From April 5 to April 8, columns of American tanks and other armored vehicles rampaged down the city’s highways and through its

suburbs seeking to kill the disorganized and hopelessly outgunned Iraqi defenders, or force them into the open for annihilation by American aircraft stalking the skies above.

At least 2,000 Iraqis were killed in clashes from April 3 to April 4 at the approaches to and within Baghdad’s international airport. The American military claims as many as 3,000 Iraqis were killed on April 5 during a three-hour assault through southwestern Baghdad by tanks from the Third Infantry Division. At least 1,000 Iraqis are believed to have been killed on April 7 during the US tank assault on the Republican presidential palace on the banks of the Tigris. Hundreds more are estimated to have been killed during the eight hours of fighting on April 8 in both the south and east of Baghdad, as US forces pushed into the center of the city to attack the main headquarters of Iraq’s government and military.

The casualties among Iraqi civilians have been horrific. Journalists for Arab television networks and newspapers, the British *Guardian* and *Independent* and the *Washington Post* have all testified that large numbers of civilians were killed and wounded by the US and British forces as they crushed resistance in Baghdad, Basra and other Iraqi cities and towns. The US military, in particular, has indiscriminately bombed civilian areas and targeted civilian vehicles.

A *Washington Post* article on April 8 headlined “At Intersection, Army’s Mission Turns to Chaos” detailed some of the carnage inflicted by US forces during their forays into Iraq’s capital: “The Bravo company convoy drove past dozens of burned-out vehicles and charred bodies on the way to downtown Baghdad.... Civilian passenger cars and trucks were also among the blasted vehicles, some with corpses inside. Whether they were fighters heading south to engage the Americans or luckless civilians trying to escape the city remained unknown.”

The article described what transpired after the convoy came under fire: “Any vehicle that approached from the north was considered fair game. Several civilian vehicles were blasted with 25mm high-explosive rounds and machine gun fire, their passengers assumed to be hostile.”

A dispatch filed April 8 for the *Washington Post* by correspondent Anthony Shadid cited a wounded man at Baghdad’s Kindi hospital, who said, “I’m a civilian. My car

was attacked. They attacked my car.” Another man wounded by shrapnel in an artillery barrage during the April 5 attack on southern Baghdad stated: “We didn’t do anything to them. I was 100 percent sure they would not shoot at a civilian. Now I’m 100 percent sure they will.” A man from the southern suburb of Yamama accused US forces of “firing at any car, any person.” The hospital was reportedly stacking bodies on top of one another in its morgue.

Robert Fisk of the British *Independent* wrote on April 8 about the civilian casualties he had seen in Kindi hospital—a two-and-a-half-year-old boy dying, a man who saw a family blown to pieces in front of him by a US bomb, an 11-year-old girl with her stomach torn open by shrapnel.

Britain’s *Daily Mirror* on April 8 published a report under the headline “Boy Bomb Victim Struggles Against Despair,” which read, in part: “Ali Ismaeel Abbas, 12, was fast asleep when war shattered his life. A missile obliterated his home and most of his family, leaving him orphaned, badly burned—and blowing off both his arms.

“With tears running down his face he asked: ‘Can you help me get my arms back? Do you think the doctors can get me another pair of hands? If I don’t get a pair of hands I will commit suicide. I wanted to be an army officer when I grow up but not any more. Now I want to be a doctor—but how can I? I don’t have hands.’”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 100 civilian casualties per hour were being brought into Baghdad hospitals following the April 5 US armored assault. Morphine and other medicines were running out, staff were exhausted and operating facilities were stretched to the limit. The WHO reported amputations being performed without adequate anesthesia.

Outside Baghdad, similar reports of carnage have been filed. A correspondent for the Saudi Arabian-based *Arab News* interviewed a wounded resident of the small town of Sanawa on April 8: “One Iraqi soldier will enter a neighborhood and fire a few shots at a fighter plane, and they [the US aircraft] will respond with a barrage of shots killing as many as 50 civilians in the effort to get him.” A local resident, Sami Osama, was allegedly shot dead when he did not stop on a verbal command—given in English—by US troops.

Arab News reported April 9 from a residential neighborhood of Najaf that had been devastated by US aircraft attempting to destroy a column of Iraqi military trucks: “Many Iraqi military vehicles were abandoned, burned out after being targeted by US planes. A resident of the street, who said his uncle and sister were killed in the bombings, told *Arab News*: ‘I think the Americans wanted to destroy these military trucks, but in order to do that they had to destroy our neighborhood three streets deep.’ Just yards from these trucks lay the rubble of what once were civilian homes, completely destroyed—houses, shelters and cars.”

Unexploded cluster bombs are strewn throughout the area.

The city’s hospital reported to *Arab News* it had processed 287 civilian corpses and treated 920 wounded.

On top of the loss of life inflicted on the Iraqi people, many of their cities and towns have been devastated. The power generation and communication infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged. Water and drainage mains have been ruptured, cutting off water supplies and flooding suburbs with raw sewage. Bridges, highways and hundreds of government and civilian buildings have been reduced to rubble, along with hundreds of houses and office buildings.

There is little doubt that large sections of Iraqi society will emerge from the invasion deeply traumatized. The country has been subjected to US aggression for over 12 years. The bombing during the first Gulf war wrought immense destruction and claimed thousands of lives. Economic sanctions and continuous US bombing throughout the 1990s claimed the lives of tens of thousands more and prevented any meaningful reconstruction. Weak and helpless, Iraq has now been subjected to the final humiliation—the entry of foreign troops into its capital for the first time since 1941.

The war against Iraq is an atrocity. The Iraqis did not welcome the American and British troops as liberators, but rather fought them for what they were—invaders seeking to impose colonial rule on the country. The response of the Bush administration and the Pentagon, with the support of the British and Australian governments, which sent troops to participate, was to order a bloodbath.

The world has witnessed the US utilizing its overwhelming military superiority to massacre Iraqi soldiers and civilians, lay waste to the country’s cities, and kill international journalists attempting to document its crimes. The scene of jubilant American troops in Baghdad, hoisting the stars and stripes over statues and buildings, is both ugly and tragic.

Drunk on its victory and deluded by its false sense of invincibility, the Bush administration is proceeding with the installation of a puppet government. Protected by a garrison of US troops, it will provide a fig leaf of legality to the transfer of the country’s oil wealth to American corporations—realizing the most immediate war aim of US imperialism. The claim that anything progressive will come of this for the Iraqi people is an affront to the moral conscience and intelligence of humanity.



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